Jacquemin provides strong evidence that it can. The challenge for information retrieval research is to identify methods and algorithms that make use of work like Jacquemin’s to improve the quality of information retrieval.

References


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Though often considered a business fad, knowledge management continues to be one of the most discussed and researched topics in business, information systems, and information science. Unlike many knowledge management books on the market which focus on either a practitioner or researcher perspective, Coakes, Willis, and Clark’s Knowledge Management in the SocioTechnical World—The Graffiti Continues presents a readable collection of research-based articles that will appeal to both camps.

Knowledge management is variably defined. Is it a technology for document classification and retrieval across the enterprise? An organizational environment enabling knowledge sharing? Or perhaps the activities of the individual within a knowledge-centric organization? Viewing knowledge management from a purely technological perspective has not been fruitful. What has been missing, and what the research in Knowledge Management in the SocioTechnical World—The Graffiti Continues shows, is how acknowledging the individual, the individual’s role, the organization’s knowledge sharing needs, and the organizational culture, when added to technologies such as databases and web-based discussion boards, provides a more complete understanding of knowledge management.

Knowledge Management in the SocioTechnical World—The Graffiti Continues is divided into four parts—Know-Why, Know-What, Know-Who, and Know-How—each part addressing those particular aspects of knowledge management. Representative themes from each section are presented this review.
Know-Why offers an interesting look at what should be the perfect environment for knowledge management, the university. Though knowledge is their core business, it is posited that universities fail to take up the knowledge management challenge because of their inadequate use of information technology to create “knowledge repositories.” (p. 45) Collaborative efforts notwithstanding, awards and recognition in the university are obtained through individual knowledge acquisition, not knowledge-sharing. In addition, creativity, so necessary to knowledge use and application in the business environment, often is frowned upon in the university. Get too creative, go too far from the established body of knowledge, and the result is not respect and acclaim from your peers. In many cases, bringing information from other contexts to inform and add to your discipline’s knowledge base also is not appreciated. The authors warn against a too ready assumption that knowledge management operates in a vacuum and can be dropped in anywhere, without regard to the very human elements of personnel, policies, and politics that act as constraints against a successful knowledge management system implementation.

Know-What is a short section with two articles examining the individual. While proponents of knowledge management engage in vigorous discussion of sharing knowledge across the organization or knowledge sharing in teams, it is surprising how often the role of the individual is given short shrift. Yet it is the individual worker who has the knowledge that the organization or team needs. The reader is reminded of the individual’s importance to solving the problems of “…the transition of tacit individual knowledge to measurable and usable organizational knowledge…” (pp. 77–78)

The examples of the socio-technical approach in business are interesting as evidence of the misunderstanding of the individual’s role in knowledge exchange. One firm’s discussion board is designed to “transfer tacit knowledge into a repository.” A better understanding of tacit knowledge would prevent such misguided statements from being made as they show a lack of understanding of the nature of tacit knowledge. Other firms show a better understanding of the tacit knowledge problem by using coaching to facilitate the information exchange or providing time for employees to network and share stories about their work. It is indicative of the continuing problems in implementing knowledge management systems that even in organizations whose lifeblood is knowledge sharing, when personnel in these same organizations say they don’t have time to engage in these activities.

Know-Who reveals how changes in one firm’s physical space, coupled with supporting technology, dramatically improved the amount of cross function collaboration and communication amongst employees. The research points out the oft-overlooked fact that while knowledge management technology is certainly useful for dispersed employees, having a physical location that enables face-to-face communication also contributes to a successful implementation.

While a physical space and technology can aid in providing opportunities for knowledge sharing, it may be difficult to create sharing communities. A pilot study examining a community of practice (which appeared to be an artificial creation rather than a spontaneous gathering of like-minded members of the firm) showed how the lack of a project champion can hinder knowledge management projects. Also contributing to problems in this pilot was a lack of time for collaboration. Providing technical support for the community proved to be ineffective where there was no champion to encourage participation or time to actively engage in collaboration. Participants benefited from learning ‘who knows what,’ but the pilot